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UNCLAS VIENNA 002690

DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: KPAO, AU, OPRC

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: September 08, 2006

Third TV Debate

1. The third in a series of television debates between Austrian political leaders was a face-off Thursday night between the Social Democrats' boss Alfred Gusenbauer and BZOe leader Peter Westenthaler. As expected, the two politicians strongly disagreed on issues including the bank Bawag and immigration laws. Gusenbauer called the BZOe's plan to get up to 300,000 foreigners out of Austria "mass deportations."

In the -- according to ORF online news at times quite confrontational -- televised debate with BZOe boss Peter Westenthaler, SPOe leader Alfred Gusenbauer dismissed the BZOe's call to reduce the number of foreigners in Austria by 30 percent as "disgusting and defamatory hate campaigning." The party's demand to deport foreigners on such a massive scale is entirely unrealistic, Gusenbauer added. Westenthaler, in turn, accused the SPOe chairperson of "backing criminal aliens." The SPOe leader stressed that he is convinced the BZOe will no longer be represented in parliament following the October 1 election, which "will put an end to the party's nepotism and misanthropic policies." Westenthaler, meanwhile, accused the SPOe of mismanagement in connection with the

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scandal surrounding union-owned bank Bawag.

Saliera Thief Is Given Light Jail Term

2. The man who stole the Saliera from Vienna's Art History Museum was sentenced yesterday to four years in prison. A court in Vienna handed down the sentence against Robert Mang, who has admitted stealing the Italian Renaissance saltcellar by Benvenuto Cellini from the museum in May, 2003, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung says like all Austrian media.

Greens Develop Plan to Back out of Eurofighter Deal

3. For years, Greens MP Peter Pilz has been trying to axe the Austrian government's deal to purchase EADS' Eurofighter interceptors for the country. Now he believes he has found a way to back out of the purchase deal using an offset deal with Airbus, writes newly established daily Oesterreich.

Bin Laden 9/11 Video Surfaces

4. Only days ahead of the fifth anniversary of the strikes, Al Jazeera television has aired video footage showing al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden meeting what is said to be some of the perpetrators of the September 11, 2001 attacks. The video was filmed more than five years ago and is said to be showing preparations for the attacks. ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal comments on the al Qaeda tape: "Osama bin Laden was videotaped five years ago at a meeting with several important al Qaeda terrorists. According to al Jazeera, Ramzi Binalshibh, the 9/11 terrorist attacks' chief coordinator, as well as the former al Qaeda military leader Mohammed Atef, can be seen on the tape. The meeting probably took place in a mountain region in eastern Afghanistan. The tape also shows combat training, and bin Laden calling on people to pray for the suicide attackers, as well as two perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, who are reading their last will and testament. By airing the video footage, al Qaeda wants to remind the world how dangerous it continues to be shortly before the fifth anniversary of 9/11. But the five-year-old tape also raises new questions about al Qaeda's clout. As the Bush administration announced yesterday, Ramzi Binalshibh is en route from a secret CIA prison to Guantanamo. Mohammed Atef was killed in November 2001 during US air strikes in Afghanistan. And Osama bin Laden has not appeared on camera for almost two years. But even if the terrorist organization does no longer exist in the same form as five years ago, there are enough young extremists left who are willing to carry out attacks in the name of al Qaeda. Today, al Qaeda appears to be an ideology rather than an organization."

Europe Outraged over CIA Prisons

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5. By acknowledging the existence of covert CIA prisons to hold and interrogate terrorist suspects, US President George Bush has re-angered Europeans. Human rights organizations and European politicians have reacted with outrage to the US President's admission in a speech earlier this week, complaining it was a "wholehearted defense" of torture practices.

In centrist daily Die Presse, Washington correspondent Norbert Rief says that in the run-up to the mid-term elections, the Republicans are once again "playing the terror card." Bush won two elections with this topic already, Rief says and adds: "The fifth anniversary of 9/11 and the continuously present terrorist threat is to help guarantee the Republicans will keep a majority in both the House and the Senate." In addition, the White House has "created an uncomfortable situation for the Democrats with the transfer of a

number of terrorism suspects to Guantanamo and the expected charges to be brought against them. After all, the Democrats have long demanded that alleged terrorists be given fair trials. Now it looks as if Bush is willing to grant them that, albeit only on his own conditions." The Democrats, however, have said they are conditions they will not accept. It's a catch-22 situation for the Democrats, according to Rief: "If they question the tribunals' legitimacy, Bush could accuse them of trying to delay the trials they've been demanding for so long, and claim they are soft on terrorism in the bargain."

Concern over Violence in Afghanistan

6. NATO's top commander of operations has acknowledged the Alliance has underestimated the level of violence in southern Afghanistan. General James Jones urged members to provide reinforcements. According to a number of NATO commanders stationed in Afghanistan, the violence there is worse than in Iraq, says ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal.

Partial Lifting of Lebanon Blockade

7. Lebanon has welcomed Israel's decision to ease its blockade of Lebanon by lifting the air embargo imposed eight weeks ago. However, a naval blockade is likely to remain until a sufficient UN naval force is in place, writes newly established daily Oesterreich.

Armitage disclosed Plame Identity

8. The former number two State Department official has admitted he disclosed the identity of CIA employee Valerie Plame. Former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said his action was a "terrible mistake,.." ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal reports. McCaw

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